

# **THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS: PAST AND FUTURE TRENDS**

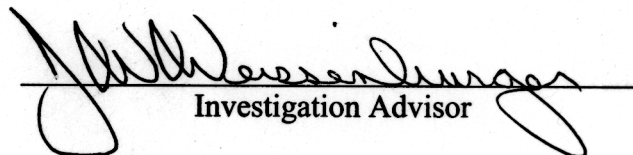
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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the historical and current role of school psychologists. A literature review and a critical analysis of the literature was performed to assess the evolution of school psychology and certain factors that influence the role. The history of the role, regional differences in the role, and the perceptions of the role are discussed. In addition, the literature review considers A Blueprint for Training and Practice II (Blueprint II) (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997) as it is related to the role, the profession's perceptions about the future of school psychology, and the barriers to role expansion. A critical analysis compares the findings of the literature review, and determines what further research would contribute to our knowledge about the future role of school psychologists.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Discussions and arguments for change in the functional role of school psychologists have appeared in the literature for the past 50 years (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000). Because of the obvious and growing need for prevention and intervention services due to increasing numbers of at-risk youths, school psychologists are being encouraged to expand their role. Discussions have centered on the traditional role, the current confusion about the role, and role expansion.

In school psychology, the traditional role has been linked with serving children who have not progressed along with their peers (Tharinger, 1995). Whether it has been to segregate these students, or to help mainstream them, school psychologists have used testing as a tool to label or diagnose children who exhibit academic or behavioral difficulties (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998). Often, traditional school psychologists have used normative-based assessments to compare a child's performance with their peers from a national normative sample (Bardon, 1994). While practitioners will use clinical judgment to determine whether a student should receive special education services, the student first needs to perform a certain way on assessments to "qualify" for the label. This process allows educators to provide the student with certain services they would not ordinarily receive. This type of diagnostic/medicalized assessment has been around in some variation or another since the turn of the century (Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995), and many traditional school psychologists have been viewed as the "gate-keepers" for special education services (Deno, 1995). Today, traditional school psychologists continue to use intelligence tests to extract meaning from subtests, a process some believe adds little new information (Canter, 1997).

The current role of school psychologists continues to be overwhelmingly geared toward the assessment and diagnosis of children with special needs (Reschly & Wilson, 1995). An impetus for assessment as the primary role came with the passage of Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). However, the role of school psychologists as assessors was around long before this influential law.

Many professionals within the field contend that if school psychologists do not adapt to school reform, diagnose less, and learn to deal with increased poverty, diversity, and social pathology, they may not survive (Bardon, 1994). A trend toward greater role expansion is also reflected in national law, committee resolutions, state law, and licensing practices (Gutkin, 1995). Further, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) supports working in teams in an expanded, supportive way for students rather than labeling and specially placing students (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997). Another consideration is that performing a traditional activity like labeling youth with terms like “mental retardation” because of their problems is viewed a medical or diagnostic act. When school psychologists provide labels like this one, practitioners appear to be pseudo-psychiatrists. Since labeling students can be viewed as an anti-educational act, school psychologists who participate in the labeling process may be in danger of losing their importance in the educational system (Gutkin, 1995).

Confusion about the role of school psychologists is understandable given the multiple factors that influence our service delivery. Reform movements, state laws, national laws, and children’s needs have heavily influenced the school psychologist’s role. In addition, administrator demands, practitioner desires or fears about changing their role, and the National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) have been major influences on the role and function of school psychologists in today’s society.

While the role of school psychologists is confusing, much of current literature in the field has concluded that the future direction of school psychology will involve role expansion (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995; Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998; Grimley, 1978; Gutkin, 1995; Myers, 1998; Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; Tharinger, 1995; Thomas & Levinson, 1992; Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997). Some of the broad trends in school psychology include health promotion, de-medicalizing what we do, and seeing the environment of the child as a significant influence on how the child behaves. An emphasis on prevention activities,

increasing the coordination of school-based services (versus piecemeal and unsystematic services), and providing services that depend more on the unique needs of the local community and school are more specific directions. Other proclivities in the functional role include helping teachers develop new teaching techniques, developing less clear role boundaries and greater coordination/collaboration with other health specialties, encouraging sensitivity toward the family and the multicultural community, and evaluating the effectiveness of instructional programs.

Even though the argument seems strong for expanding the role of school psychologists and reducing the importance of assessing and diagnosing children, controversy continues to surround this issue. Many school psychologists believe that norm-referenced tests yield valuable information about students (Hyman, 1995; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1990). In addition, many practitioners are fearful that the reduction of assessment activities may decrease the necessity for their services since many school psychologists are partially supported by the national and state laws that are strongly tied to assessment (Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994).

A primary reason for expanding the role of school psychologists, however, is the health, education, and welfare of our children. Increased stressors, concomitant health problems, and suicide rates in the United States underscore the need for intervention, prevention, direct services and indirect interventions for the nation's youth. Many believe these needs outweigh the need for testing services that often address a minority of our nation's needy children (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998).

In 1997, NASP published School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice II (Blueprint II). The authors designed this publication to be used as a guide for school psychologists and trainers. The authors of this document favored an expanded role for school psychologists. This publication identified ten areas of skill and competency related to the trends annotated above (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997).

As is indicated, there has been much written regarding the role and function of school psychologists. The purpose of this literature review is to examine many of the aspects related to

the role of school psychologists. Another objective is to determine what further research might provide direction for the profession of school psychology.



## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The following discussion will examine many important themes exploring the past, present, and future of the role of school psychologists. First, the history of school psychology is examined. Next, the actual and the desired role of school psychologists is discussed from a national perspective. Then, regional differences in how school psychologists perceive their actual and desired role are examined. Further, research on the perceptions and attitudes of school administrators and other school personnel is examined. A discussion about current trends toward role expansion is additionally presented to understand what specific elements might be included in these trends. Furthermore, Blueprint II's importance toward critically and empirically examining role expansion as a preferred trend of school psychology is articulated. Finally, many challenges and barriers that may impede a school psychologist's efforts toward role expansion are presented.

#### History of School Psychology

The need for a psychologist's role in the schools was generated when a federal compulsory education law in 1852 flooded schools with a diversity of children (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998). This mandate introduced significant numbers of children with physical, learning, developmental, behavior, and emotional problems to our nation's schools. Many of these children found success unusually difficult within the academic and social parameters of American schools. Psychologists were introduced to the schools, and they were given the task of sorting, selecting, and segregating students (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Roberts & Rust, 1994; Tharinger, 1995).

Lightner Witmer was one of the first persons to train clinical psychologists in the early 1900's to solve problems that hindered a student's progress, and this problem-solving process typically involved the administration of assessments (Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995; Tharinger, 1995). He became the father of both clinical and school psychology (Fagan, 1986). These fields began as a merged entity, and they did not become differentiated into two separate

fields until the 1930's (French, 1990).

In 1925, Walter, a director of psychological measurements in his school district, described the role of school psychologists more inclusively than that of administrators of assessments (French, 1990). He described six functions of school psychologists. They included: select and interpret tests used in the schools; diagnose problem cases through intellectual assessment, emotional observations, and background information from teachers and parents; develop therapeutic programs and conduct therapy; conduct research; use expertise in psychology to contribute to the understanding of learning problems; and consult with teachers.

The split between clinical and school psychology began in the 1930's with the first governmental regulations on professional psychological practice (French, 1990). In 1945, professional psychology became more specialized as the American Psychological Association (APA) developed nineteen divisions. Division 16 of the APA was created for school psychology (Fagan, 1986; French, 1990).

Two conferences in the psychological field would significantly alter the paths of clinical and school psychology. The Thayer Conference, in 1954, and the Boulder Conference, a few years earlier, finally differentiated the roles of clinical and school psychologists. The Thayer conference emphasized school psychology as a practice in the schools and with children. The Boulder Conference highlighted clinical psychology as a science which focused on the adult population (French, 1990).

Initially, many school psychologists chose the path of non-doctoral practice. This trend did not coincide with APA's stress on doctoral-level training. The National Association of School Psychology (NASP) was formed in 1969 (French, 1990) to encompass both doctoral and non-doctoral practitioners (Fagan, 1986; French, 1990). In context, school psychology developed as a specialty recognized by APA, and developed further as a separate identity with the creation of NASP (French, 1990).

The federal Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, which was re-authorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandated a free

and appropriate public education to all children with disabilities. For school psychologists, this law equaled job security. However, it also helped foster the development of school psychologists as assessors, diagnosticians, and “gatekeepers” for special education services (Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Time, 1995; Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995; Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998).

### Actual Versus Desired Role

The actual role of school psychologists appears to lean heavily toward assessment and conducting special education evaluations (Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Connolly; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Smith, 1984). Reschly and Wilson (1995) studied national data compiled in 1991-1992. They found that more than one-half of practitioner time was devoted to performing psychoeducational assessments, about 20% of their time was spent on direct interventions, and the rest of their time was spent on consultation and research. Wilson and Reschly (1996) predicted that the use of intelligence testing would not abate due to the legal mandates in which disabilities are identified through the use of such assessments.

More recently, Curtis, Hunley, Walker, and Baker (1999) examined national data from a 1994-1995 survey of school psychologists. About 60 % of the respondents reported spending more than 70% of their time completing special education evaluations. The researchers determined that most assessments psychologists conduct are for special education purposes. These findings are consistent with Reschly and Wilson’s findings (1995).

The desired role of school psychologists generally involves a reduction in time spent on psychoeducational assessments, and an increase in intervention planning, consultation, and research services (Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Roberts, 1970; Roberts & Rust, 1994; Smith, 1984). Nationally, this equates to school psychologists spending 32% of their time on assessment, 28% on direct interventions, 23% on problem-solving consultation, 10% on organizational-systems consultation, and 7% on research-evaluation (Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

Some school psychologists have been considered practitioners of ‘exemplary’ programs (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998). Their actual role is much different from most school psychologists (Reschly & Wilson, 1995). These unique school psychologists spend about

21% of their time on assessment, 27% in consultation, 20% in counseling, 16% in prevention, 10% in other components of program implementation/design/ and evaluation, and 6% in research (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998). The one identifiable problem is that by spending so little time in research, many school psychologists are not disseminating vital information that could increase role expansion. Expanding the role of research for these unique individuals could be considered desirable by others in the field (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998).

### Regional Differences in Role

Few studies have been conducted concerning the regional differences in the functional activities of school psychologists. The Reschly and Connolly (1990) study found that there was little difference between rural, suburban, and urban districts concerning how much time school psychologists spent on special education evaluations. According to the Reschly and Connolly (1990) study, school psychologists spent about 66% of their time in this role. In a 1992-1993 comparative study (Roberts & Rust, 1994), results indicated that school psychologists in Tennessee devoted 66% of their time to assessment activities. Conversely, in Iowa, Roberts and Rust (1994) found that the school psychologists spent 51% of their time on assessment related activities. The same school psychologists from both states indicated that they preferred to spend less time on assessment, but only by 16% in Tennessee and 5% in Iowa. One could conclude from this study that school psychologists in these states were reluctant to completely relinquish their assessment role.

Results from the Roberts and Rust (1994) study suggest that great differences appear between the states in the service delivery and attitudes of school psychologists. While it appears that nationally school psychologists would like to reduce assessments to one-third of their role (Reschly & Wilson, 1995), in Tennessee and Iowa practitioners appear to prefer that assessment related activities take up approximately one-half of their time (Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Roberts & Rust, 1994).

By examining practitioner to student ratios and the number of evaluations practitioners perform yearly, an impression of regional differences in the role of school psychologists can be

obtained. According to a 1999 national survey (Thomas, Joaquin, & Toleski, 1999), the national school psychologist to student ratio is 1 to 1816. Regionally, the highest ratio is in Hawaii, with 1 school psychologist to 8,252 students. The lowest ratio is in New York with 1 school psychologist to 817 students. According to this study, Connecticut follows closely with a 1 to 844 ratio. The recommended minimum ratio by NASP is 1 students to 1000 students in order to promote a broad role (Lund & Reschly, 1998). It is likely that these differing ratios can have an effect on the activities and role of the school psychologist on a state by state basis.

A national survey (Thomas, Joaquin, & Toleski, 1999) found that school psychologists average 87.5 evaluations per year. Regionally, the greatest number of yearly evaluations is in Hawaii, with 160, and Alaska, with 143. Connecticut and New Jersey reported conducting the fewest number of assessments, with Connecticut averaging 49 and New Jersey averaging 53 per year (Thomas, Joaquin, & Toleski, 1999). A preliminary examination of the states' ratio figures and number of yearly evaluation figures suggests a positive correlation. Therefore, a hypothesis could be made that in schools where there is a greater student to practitioner ratio, school psychologists would be more likely to complete larger numbers of yearly evaluations than those in schools where a smaller student to practitioner ratio exists. Further research in this area is needed to determine the relation between school psychologist ratios and assessment-related activities.

#### Perceptions of School Administrators and Other School Personnel

In 1964, Tindall was one of the first to suggest that the leadership of the school administrator is one of the most instrumental variables affecting the school psychologist's role. Therefore, one way researchers have evaluated the actual time school psychologists spend in certain roles is to examine the school administrators' and other school personnels' perceptions. Researchers have examined the school administrators' and personnels' perceptions about what they believe to be the most beneficial school psychology activities. Researchers have also examined school administrators' and personnels' satisfaction with the school psychologist's actual role (Abel & Burke, 1985; Beauchamp, 1994; Cheraimie & Sutter, 1993; Hartshorne &

Johnson, 1985; Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992). In addition, the perceptions of school administrators and personnel concerning influential factors and possible solutions related to the school psychologist's role have been examined (Abel & Burke, 1985; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992).

Most research seems to focus on the school administrators' and personnels' perceptions related to their satisfaction with the school psychologist's role. In general, many educational colleagues were satisfied with the way school psychologists spent their time, with the quality of their knowledge, and with the effectiveness of their services (Abel & Burke, 1985; Cheramie & Sutter, 1993; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992). In addition, one study found that the more time school psychologists spent consulting with teachers, the more satisfied school administrators were with their school psychologists (Beauchamp, 1994).

A considerable amount of research focuses on the perceptions of administrators and other personnel about the amount of actual time school psychologists spend completing specific activities and what they believe would be the most beneficial amount of time for school psychologists to spend completing those activities (Abel & Burke, 1985; Beauchamp, 1994; Cheramie & Sutter, 1993; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992). According to one study, administrators and other school personnel believed that school psychologists spend most of their time in assessment and consultation (Cheramie & Sutter, 1993). Also, the same study found that administrators and other school personnel thought greater time was needed to perform consulting and counseling services (Abel & Burke, 1985; Cheramie & Sutter, 1993; Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985). However, research also suggests that administrators and other school personnel still identify assessment as the top priority in the role and function of school psychologists (Abel & Burke, 1985; Beauchamp, 1994).

A smaller proportion of research focuses on the perceptions of administrators and other educational personnel about the factors influencing school psychologists' role (Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985). The Hartshorne and Johnson (1985) study examined four possible influences:

the training and personality of the individual practitioner, the circumstances unique to the school or setting, and special education regulations. The study found that school administrators believed that special education regulations appeared to be the most influential factor impacting the role and functioning of school psychologists.

A 1992 study (Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992) of school administrators suggested several other potential influences on the role of school psychologists. These included: differences in the demographic composition of students in school, differences in the organizational/structural delivery of special education services, and the economic considerations of specific school districts. Expanding this area of research is needed because so little objective evidence is forthcoming about factors that may influence the practitioner's role.

### Role Expansion

Role expansion appears to be a trend in school psychology. What role expansion might include has been articulated by many. Some have found that broad trends in school psychology should include the promotion of health services, assisting all students, and seeing the environment of the child as a significant influence on how the child behaves (Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Time, 1995; Gutkin, 1995; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; Tharinger, 1995; Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997).

Health promotion, a broad trend, was listed as the first function of school psychologists in a brochure published by the American Psychological Association in 1994 (Gutkin, 1995). Tharinger (1995) concluded that health promotion would include services that assessed mental health disorders, the psychosomatics of illness, and high-risk behaviors like alcohol and substance abuse in our nation's youth. In addition, Tharinger (1995) argued that health promotion should include health education, believing that this service would decrease the incidences of those health issues mentioned above. She ascertained that health promotion should include a coordination of health/mental health and educational development. To promote health services, schools and their communities would need to be examined to determine what practices are blocking or cultivating the manifestation of healthy behavior (Power, McGoe, Heathfield, &

Blum, 1999).

Another trend is to assist all students, not just special education students, to develop into healthy and educated adults. However, this can be particularly difficult when the school psychologists are encouraged to focus on single students and provide special educational assessments. As far back as 1978, some contended that the role of school psychologists needed to be expanded to help as many children as possible (Grimley, 1978). This philosophy is supported by NASP with the more recent publication, Blueprint II (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997). This document states, “School psychologists have a role to play in advocating for reductions in all forms of demissions, expulsions, suspensions, and “drop outs” –and for increasing inclusive education options to meet the needs of all students, especially those most disenfranchised from the system” (p.3).

A final broad trend is for school psychologists to develop a philosophy where the environment of the child is perceived as a significant influence on how the child behaves. This is an ecological focus on the child’s behavior, performance, and development. The demands and quality of the child’s environment can influence how the child behaves, as well as how their personality develops (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Gutkin, 1995).

Other specific trends include an emphasis on prevention activities, increasing the coordination of school-based services (versus piecemeal and unsystematic services), and the provision of services that depend more on the unique needs of the local community and school (Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998). Prevention activities tend to be educationally, and not medically, based (Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Time, 1995). By examining previous research, school psychologists can ascertain and recommend the best prevention activities for their school districts (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998). Due to the cost-effectiveness of prevention activities and the high prevalence of health problems in today’s youth, a focus on prevention versus expensive reactionary measures seems to be a logical step (Gutkin, 1995; Power, McGoey, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999).

Another direction for the field is coordinated school-based services where school



psychologists and others solve problems through team development and system-wide involvement. School-based collaborative services can include teacher assistance teams, interagency collaboration models, intensive service coordination, and other services ranging from prevention to treatment. Other collaborative services can include information networks with others (social workers, community workers, etc.), prereferral assistance teams, community-based service delivery, and becoming culturally competent (Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998). Further, school-based services can include a school/community team used to monitor and implement programs, promote the involvement of peers and family in volunteering, and ensure the provision of training to educators and other staff members concerning their role in school-based services (Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999).

According to many, specific services would be best determined through an evaluation of the unique needs of the school and community, rather than through the latest fad (Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; Grimley, 1978). With greater collaboration between services, there is a tendency to develop less clear role boundaries and greater coordination or collaboration with other health specialties in order to be as flexible and effective as possible (Tharinger, 1995). When working with others, school psychologists can direct improvements in current programs while developing new ones (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998; Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; Tharinger, 1995).

Within the assessment domain, the field of school psychology is heading toward a variety of directions. One area of assessment that is opening up for school psychologists is program evaluation (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998; Grimley, 1978; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998; Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; Tharinger, 1995). Another area of expansion includes outcome based assessment such as curriculum based measures and functional behavior analyses (Canter, 1997; Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Time, 1995; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999).

Providing indirect services also continues to develop for school psychologists. One targeted area is helping teachers develop new teaching techniques to enhance student problem

solving through promoting teacher development and providing in-service education and consultation services (Tharinger, 1995). Other populations to receive indirect services from the school psychologist are families and communities. School psychologists can accomplish this by encouraging sensitivity toward the family and the multicultural community through obtaining cultural knowledge (Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998).

### Blueprint II

The role of the school psychologist has been addressed by NASP. This is particularly noticeable in the publication, School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice II (Blueprint II). This document was published by NASP in 1997 as a guide for school psychologists and trainers (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997). The authors of this document advocated for an expanded role for school psychologists. The introduction of this publication argues that changes in society and schools has exacerbated the need for role expansion.

Blueprint II distinguished ten areas of skill and competency to be considered within the training and practice of school psychology. These domains include (1) data-based decision making and accountability; (2) interpersonal communication, collaboration, and consultation; (3) effective instruction and development of cognitive/academic skills; (4) socialization and development of life competencies (5) student diversity in development and learning (6) school structure, organization, and climate; (7) prevention, wellness promotion, and crisis intervention; (8) home/school/community collaboration; (9) research and program evaluation; and (10) legal, ethical practice, and professional development. Blueprint II's authors asserted that striving to obtain a high level of expertise in all of these domain areas is a commendable goal. However, they understood that this goal might be a bit unrealistic. The authors recommended that school psychologists should obtain expertise in the four areas: data-based decision making and accountability; legal and ethical practices; interpersonal communication, collaboration, and consultation; and student diversity in development and learning. According to Blueprint II, a range of proficiency in the other six areas is expected, but continued professional development in

all areas also is recommended.

Two recent studies were conducted in Wisconsin involving Blueprint II's domains of competency (Myers, 1999; Myers, 1998). The first study examined the perceptions of Wisconsin's school psychologists related to the current and future role (Myers, 1998). School psychologists in Wisconsin perceived that their current role was diverse, but they also perceived that their role would become even more diverse in the future. Additionally, NASP members from the Wisconsin sample acknowledged that their role would become more diverse in the future than those who were nonmembers (Myers, 1998).

In the Myers study (1998), Wisconsin school psychologists' responses resulted in identifying the top four domains as: data-based decision making and accountability; legal, ethical practice and professional development, prevention, wellness promotion, and crisis intervention; and interpersonal communication, collaboration, and consultation. This matched three out of four of Blueprint II's most important domains. Unlike the perceptions of the Wisconsin school psychologists, Blueprint II did not consider 'prevention, wellness promotion, and crisis intervention' as one of the most important four domains (Myers, 1998).

A second Wisconsin study examined the future role of school psychologists as perceived by school administrators (Myers, 1999). The findings were consistent with perceptions of practicing school psychologists from the previously mentioned study (Myers, 1998). Since administrators are considered to be strong influences on the role of school psychologists (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998; Tapasak & Keller, 1995), the findings would seem hopeful for those who promote a broad-based role for school psychologists. School administrators in Wisconsin also agreed with the Wisconsin school psychologists' perceptions on the most important four domains (Myers, 1999).

#### Potential Barriers for Role Expansion

While role expansion appears to be "on the horizon", Ysseldyke (2000) purports that it has been "on the horizon" for several years. School psychologists may face many challenges and barriers in their quest for role expansion. The literature has recognized several of these

challenges and barriers. Shortages of practitioners has been acknowledged as a possible barrier (Elliott, 2000; Lund & Reschley, 1998). Shortages can adversely affect the student-to-practitioner ratio, which may influence how much time practitioners have available for the provision of diverse services. For this reason, NASP recommends a ratio of 1,000 students to one school psychologist to encourage an expanded role (Lund & Reschley, 1998).

Burnout and attrition is another barrier that may influence student-to-practitioner ratios. For many reasons, practitioners are leaving the field at an estimated rate of 5% per year (Lund & Reschley, 1998). Burnout could be due to job dissatisfaction, often related to lack of variety in job activities (Vensel, 1981).

Another consideration is funding. Seemingly, some school districts appear to be reluctant to allocate extra funds toward the resources practitioners might need to expand their role and provide diverse services. Funding may be needed, for instance, to increase coordination efforts between the school and the community and to reimburse school-linked health services (Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995; Elliott, 2000; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998; Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999). Funding can be provided by private and public agencies, but many school psychologists may not be knowledgeable about these possible sources of revenue (Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999).

One very large barrier seems to be the lack of control practitioners perceive they have regarding their role. Many school psychologists believe district or school administrators and the administrative system, which governs school policy, have a prominent influence over what they do on the job (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998; Tapasak & Keller, 1995). According to some, if support is not given to expand their role and change the system in a large, long-lasting way, little leeway will be made (Tapasak & Keller, 1995). Further, a portion of the barrier may come down to a school psychologist's lack of knowledge and skill in learning to influence principals and other school personnel (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995).

Ysseldyke (2000) argues that the lack of role expansion is due to a lack of training by

school psychology programs in providing models of how schools have “tackled and solved” large problems. Research suggests a strong link between training and practice (Wilson & Reschly, 1996). The training focus in many graduate programs is on the science and practice of skills related to working with individual children and special education evaluations (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995). It appears that training may be needed to educate school psychologists related to systems change theory. However, little specific information is provided in the literature regarding how this training should be done (Tapasak & Keller, 1995). For systems change, curriculum focused on the principles of social psychology, organizational development, social influence, prevention, collaborative consultation, and change agents would appear helpful (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Tapasak & Keller, 1995). In addition, university faculty may need to actively pioneer needed changes in their local school districts by creating practicum and internship locations that parallel the ideology of their academic programs (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995).

Many school psychologists (practitioners and faculty) are reluctant to change. The main rationale appears to be that they do not have enough time, or are too busy, to make needed changes (Elliott, 2000). Even faculty who are urged to change and expand their areas of training use this rationale (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995). If practitioners expect others to expand their role, they may start by searching for ways to change their own behaviors and habits (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995).

Though school psychologists may claim that they are viewing student problems in light of their environmental contexts, their actions reveal that they continue to medicalize the problems exhibited by students. Medicalizing problems may hamper a school psychologist's ability to provide mental health services. According to Gutkin (1995), a trend of “demedicalizing” needs to be adopted. Instead of viewing problems as medical issues, viewing them as skill deficiencies may empower students to cope with life's events through learning coping skills. In this way, education can promote health (Gutkin, 1995). Demedicalization also is conceptualized as a decrease in the use of labels and focus in outcome-based education

(Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Time, 1995).

If school psychologists are expected to expand their role to include the coordination and collaboration of services between the home, school, and community, they need ample community resources. However, in many disadvantaged and rural community locations, access to health and social services is inadequate. This can be a major barrier for those communities as well as for school psychologists (Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995).

School psychologists often do not view themselves as systems change agents (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995). However, the versatile role of school psychologists is synonymous with being an agent of change in the schools (Power, McGoe, Heathfield, & Blum, 1999; E; Tharinger, 1995). Education and health reform has provided a bountiful opportunity for changing systems. For this to happen, however, school psychologists will need to get involved at the national, state, and local levels. Unfortunately, like other school district employees, school psychologists often perceive the situation as being beyond their control. Therefore, the perception that they lack control may prevent school psychologists from perceiving themselves as effective systems change agents (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995).

Finally, federal and state mandates have been perceived as the assessment gods, regulating the use of assessments for special education purposes. Since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was implemented, a diagnostic role for school psychologists was ensured (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998).

The role of school psychologists has become a confusing one due to the many directions in which practitioners are pulled. Many mandates pull school psychologists toward testing and labeling, and the general education initiative pushes school psychologists toward consultation and interventions in the classroom (Roberts & Rust, 1994). These mixed messages may further increase practitioners' perceptions that they lack control over outside forces.

## CHAPTER III

### Conclusions & Discussions

This study was conducted to examine the historical and current role of school psychology. A literature review and a critical analysis of the literature was performed to assess the evolution of school psychology and certain factors that influence the role. This review of the professional literature supports a complex interplay of factors that can influence the role of a school psychologist.

Several noteworthy findings were uncovered. Foremost, school psychologists may be spending more time completing special education evaluations than they desire. Some studies indicate that school psychologists would prefer to spend more of their time on intervention and prevention services that are not related to assessments and paperwork. In addition, the literature suggests that some unique school psychologists spend most of their time on non-assessment related activities. However, little research has been done concerning the unique services these school psychologists provide.

Further, the literature indicates that policy makers, researchers, and university trainers are pushing for role expansion. One push is toward promoting the health of all children. This could be accomplished through developing prevention and intervention programs based on an examination of at-risk behaviors like alcohol and substance abuse. Policy makers also stress the need for greater collaboration with co-workers, families, and the community. Examples include having school psychologists work to educate staff members about their role in a collaborative system and promoting the involvement of peers and family in volunteering.

Another finding is that policy makers believe that some universities provide inadequate training for their school psychologists to assume a broad role in the schools. In order to expand one's role, they believe training is needed in the skills that are necessary to affect change.

Some studies indicate that administrators and other school personnel are more satisfied when school psychologists consult and counsel. However, these educators continue to view assessment activities as primary for school psychologists.

Other findings suggest that there may be regional differences concerning school psychologists' perceptions about their actual versus their desired role. However, these regional differences have not been demonstrated between rural, suburban, and urban sites where school psychologists work.

### Conflicting Findings

Conflicting findings in the research also have been found. A national survey found that school psychologists want to reduce their assessment role from taking up 50% of their time to about 30% of their time (Reschly & Wilson, 1995). However, school psychologists in the states of Tennessee and Iowa indicated they would prefer to spend about half of their time on assessment-related activities (Robert & Rust, 1994). The difference between the national study (Reschly & Wilson, 1995) and the Iowa versus Tennessee study (Robert & Rust, 1994) could be explained by regional differences.

Another conflicting finding appears to be between the two studies comparing regional differences. While regional differences existed between Tennessee and Iowa regarding the actual role of the school psychologists, they did not appear between rural, suburban, and urban school districts in another study. This conflict could be explained by recognizing the inherent differences in these two studies. One study compares state differences (Reschly & Wilson, 1995), while the other compares community setting differences (Robert & Rust, 1994). Therefore, the disparity between these two studies may be due to definitional differences regarding the term 'regional.'. One also could argue that other factor(s) than community setting differences could cause the role disparity between Tennessee and Iowa.

Another complex finding is related to the overall push toward role expansion. Policy makers argue that the future of school psychology is role expansion. However, overcoming the several barriers that hinder role expansion are not adequately addressed in the literature.

### Limitations

The limitations of this study need to be considered to examine the information this review provides in proper context. One limitation of this study is that it is a literature review. An



empirical study of this issue was not conducted nor was an attempt made to conduct a meta-analysis of the previous studies. As mentioned by Kevin Dwyer (2001), little is really known about the total amount of time school psychologists spend in certain functions. This is surprising since the main function of school psychologists is considered to be that of the problem solver (Deno, 1995). The problem needs to be identified and researched as accurately as possible before effective solutions can be found.

Further, of those empirical studies conducted, most examined a small number of subjects. Most studies examined the perceptions of policy makers, not practitioners. Further, of those who were examined, most were members of NASP. The problem with these subjects is that they were not selected from the entire pool of school psychologists. Many school psychologists do not belong to NASP. In addition, in the studies examined, many subjects were usually not evenly distributed according to actual ethnicity distribution of school psychologists.

When considering the role of school psychologists, some data has been obtained through rating the perceptions of educators, including school psychologists. Perceptions are less reliable than hard evidence regarding the role of school psychologists. Therefore, not only is there limited empirical information addressing the role of school psychologists, the data that has been collected is considerably less reliable than data collected through time sampling procedures. Information gleaned from ratings tends to be unreliable because of the question regarding whether perceptions equal reality. Another factor is that many who have been surveyed are not the school psychologists themselves.

An additional limitation is that this literature review was not an exhaustive study of all research that might pertain to the topic. A literature review is only as good as the information it cites, and this information is far from complete.

A final limitation is the lack of experience of the researcher of this study. This researcher is new to the field and has practiced as a practicum student in school counseling and school psychology for approximately 700 hours. This could be a limitation due to the possible differences in perspective of a seasoned school psychologist versus a new practitioner.

Therefore, the perceptions of this novice school psychologist may have influenced the validity of this literature review's conclusions.

### Recommendations

Research in the role of the school psychologist is incomplete and needs to be extended. From the research, several areas in need of further study were extracted. First, a national study that explores any regional differences in school psychologists' perceptions and their actual role is needed to establish a foundation for future research in this area. Second, a nationwide analysis is necessary to determine what practicing school psychologists view as the main barriers and influences on their role. Third, it is important to examine training programs to find out how their program objectives parallel the activities of their graduates. Finally, research is also needed to explore what factors have helped 'exemplary' school district programs and university programs succeed (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Pluymert, 1998)

It is time to examine the problem of role expansion: through research. Of course, the complexities and scope of this problem are daunting. However, as school psychologists would not give up on the children they serve, school psychologists must not give up on their efforts to examine and perfect their role.

### Summary

This study explored the historical and current role of school psychologists. A literature review and a critical analysis of the literature was conducted to evaluate the development of school psychology and particular factors that may affect the role. The history of the role, regional differences in the role, and the perceptions of the role were discussed. In addition, the literature review considered A Blueprint for Training and Practice II (Blueprint II) (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997) as it is related to the role, the profession's perceptions about the future of school psychology, and the barriers to role expansion. A critical analysis examined noteworthy findings of the literature review, considered limitations of the study, and determined what further research would contribute to the field's knowledge about the future role of school psychologists.

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